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SIPDIS
TELEGRAM

January 07, 2003

To: No Action Addressee
Action: Unknown
From: AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI (ABU DHABI 47 - PRIORITY)
TAGS: PHUM, ELAB, PINS
Captions: None
Subject: UAEG ANNOUNCES AMNESTY FOR ILLEGAL WORKERS
Ref: None

UNCLAS ABU DHABI 00047

SIPDIS
CXABU:
ACTION: POL
INFO: RSO AMB DCM P/M ECON

DISSEMINATION: POL
CHARGE: PROG

APPROVED: AMB:MMWAHBA
DRAFTED: P/E:MMENARD
CLEARED: A/DCM:TEWILLIAMS; POL:STWILLIAMS; ECON:CMCRUMPLER

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PP RUEHC RUEHZM RUEHNE RUEHIL RUEHKA RUEHLM
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DE RUEHAD #0047/01 0070625
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 070625Z JAN 03
FM AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7735
INFO RUEHZM/GCC COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 0986
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 1147
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 0148
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 0080
RUEHML/AMEMBASSY MANILA 0428

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 ABU DHABI 000047

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR NEA/ARP

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [ELAB](#) [PINS](#) [TC](#)
SUBJECT: UAEG ANNOUNCES AMNESTY FOR ILLEGAL WORKERS

REF: ABU DHABI 3370

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: On 24 December, the UAEG announced a four month amnesty period for illegal workers to leave the UAE between 1 January 2003 and 30 April 2003. Deportees will be exempt from the payment of fines or other legal liabilities associated with residency and immigration violations. Press reports estimate that

approximately 300,000-350,000 illegals will take advantage of this general amnesty and leave the UAE. Designed to stabilize the local labor market and alleviate the growing demographic imbalance, the UAEG has launched a massive media and public awareness campaign to maximize the number of illegals seeking amnesty and eradicate thoughts that general amnesties will be a regular feature. The proof of the UAEG's commitment to reduce the number of illegals, however, will be in how it deals with and whether it will clamp down on the Emirati visa trade -- a significant source of income, especially for poorer UAE citizens. Furthermore, it is doubtful that the amnesty program will have any impact on the demographic imbalance in the UAE; we suspect that many amnesty-seekers will regularize their status in their home countries and return to the lucrative UAE market if possible. END SUMMARY.

FOUR MONTH GENERAL AMNESTY ANNOUNCED

¶2. (U) On 24 December, the UAEG announced a four month amnesty for illegal workers to leave the UAE between 1 January 2003 and 30 April 2003. The amnesty is a general pardon that exempts violators of the UAE's immigration and residency laws from the payment of fines or other legal liabilities associated with such violations. The UAEG has announced that most violators will be banned from entering the UAE for a one-year period and that companies that sponsor overstayers will also be blacklisted.

¶3. (U) This is the second time that the UAEG has declared a general amnesty period. The first amnesty in 1996 resulted in about 250,000 illegal aliens leaving the country. (See reftel.) This second amnesty was announced only after months of deliberations on methods to avoid the loopholes in the 1996 amnesty by an inter-ministry committee. The committee is chaired by Interior Undersecretary for Security Affairs Major General Saif Abdullah Al Sha'afar, and comprised of representatives from the Ministry of Interior; Ministry of Justice, Islamic Affairs and Awqaf; and the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs.

¶4. (U) The comprehensive implementation plan includes a media and public awareness campaign in multiple languages, increased inspections by the Labor Ministry, coordination between the Interior Ministry and Embassies and Consulates, and a stream-lined exit system that will include the creation of computerized databases for information on those leaving the country. UAEG officials have also appealed to the public to assist in ensuring the departure of illegal aliens.

CLEANING HOUSE: AMNESTY DESIGNED TO OPERATE AS A WORKFORCE AND DEMOGRAPHIC STABILIZER

¶5. (U) Undersecretary for Labor Affairs Dr. Khalid Al-Khazraji has expressed that the primary reason of the amnesty is to regulate and stabilize the local market by cleansing the local labor market of marginal and ineffective manpower.

¶6. (U) Press reports estimate that about 300,000-350,000 illegal aliens will take advantage of this amnesty period and leave the country. Since most of the illegals departing the country are expected to be Asian, the UAEG perceives that the amnesty will serve to help

correct its demographic imbalance -- an issue considered by many to be a security as well as a social issue in a country with a population of about 4 million, of which about 600,000 are citizens.

¶7. (U) The media has reported the following informal estimates of amnesty seekers by country:

- India 35,000-40,000
- Pakistan 20,000-30,000
- Bangladesh 10,000
- Sri Lanka 8,000-10,000
- Phillipines 5,000-10,000
- Indonesia 600

¶8. (U) It is anticipated that many amnesty seekers will try to depart the UAE at the end of the amnesty period to earn more money prior to leaving or have more time to possibly legalize their status before departure. Most amnesty seekers are expected to be visit visa overstays or workers who have been unable to renew their work permits because they have absconded from their employer and/or sponsor. Sponsors and employers who are subject to fines for failing to report run-away workers or not renewing their employees' labor cards will also be exempt from the payment of such fines.

¶9. (U) Those departing and their sponsors are responsible for paying for their transportation out of the country. To maximize the number of deportees, embassies and consulates have been working with their national airlines to award reduced airfare to amnesty seekers and have set aside funds to purchase air tickets for those who are destitute. The Labor Ministry also declared that local governments have allocated funds to cover the expenses of deporting violators during the amnesty, particularly those not reported as absconding from their sponsors, those who do not have sponsors to pay for their deportation, and those unable to pay for their own tickets.

LIBERAL AMNESTY TO BE FOLLOWED BY CRACK-DOWN
AND FULL PUNISHMENT OF VIOLATORS

¶10. (U) With the apparent purpose to eradicate the notion that amnesties will be a regular occurrence, the Interior Ministry and Labor Ministry have both emphasized that, after the amnesty period expires, labor and residency laws will be enforced strictly, with violators punished to the full extent of the law. The Labor Ministry has announced that it will increase inspections during the amnesty period and will intensify such inspections after the amnesty period expires to crackdown on those illegals remaining in the country.

¶11. (SBU) COMMENT: The UAEG has done an excellent job thus far to market the amnesty and encourage illegals to take advantage of this opportunity. Of course, this house cleaning will only be successful if followed by strict enforcement of labor and immigration laws, as promised by the Labor and Interior Ministries. The Labor Ministry should be up to the task since it has been increasing the number of its inspectors and inspections over the past year. The proof of the UAEG's commitment to reduce the number of illegals, however, will be in how it deals with and whether it will clamp down on the Emirati visa trade -- a significant source of income, especially for poorer UAE citizens. Furthermore, it is doubtful that the amnesty

program will have any impact on the demographic imbalance in the UAE; we suspect that many amnesty-seekers will regularize their status in their home countries and return to the lucrative UAE market if possible. We will report on the success or failure of the amnesty and its implementation as things progress. END COMMENT.

WAHBA